

REVIEW: *CHINA'S NEW SOCIALIST COUNTRYSIDE: MODERNITY  
ARRIVES IN THE NU RIVER VALLEY*  
BY RUSSELL HARWOOD

Reviewed by Duo Dala (Stobs stag lha ལྷོ་སྐུ་སྐུ་ལྷོ་), International  
Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam)



Russell Harwood. 2014. *China's New Socialist Countryside: Modernity Arrives in the Nu River Valley*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Over the past two decades, Chinese State led development projects such as the "Western Development Campaign" and "Build a New Socialist Countryside" have accelerated rapid and potentially irreversible economic, social, and cultural transformation in the nation's ethnic minority areas. This has caught the attention of scholars (Fischer 2008, 2011; Grant 2018; Hillman 2013, Ma 2003, and Vasantkumar 2014) and created vibrant debates over the projects' rationales and consequences. Based on a case study in Cikai Township, Gongshan County, Yunnan Province, China, Russell Harwood examines how the implementation and strict enforcement of nine-year compulsory education, implementation of environmental conservation programs, promotion of outward migration for work, and the expansion of social and economic infrastructure projects shape and reshape rural communities in western China. He also explores how local people engage, adapt and negotiate with these projects.

This ethnographic study uses household surveys, participant observations, and interviews with officials, teachers, parents, students, and local farmers. Focusing on three distinct yet interrelated dynamics - conservation, education and migration - Harwood interrogates the unique relationship between implementation of state-prescribed

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projects and local negotiation in peripheric areas of China today. Additionally, he uses Foucault's theory of governmentality (1991) and Anthony Giddens's theory of modernity (1990) to frame his overall evaluation of social, cultural, and economic transformations at work in Gongshan, as well as in every corner of contemporary China. He states:

the experience of modernity brings with it both transformation and disintegration: on the one hand, it promises 'adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world', and on the other, 'it threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are' (189).

He concludes that development policies have contributed to the marginalization of traditional agricultural livelihoods and the integration of communities with the national market economy and reliance on the Chinese Party-state. He further writes that ethnic minorities possess agency, although with limited capacity to engage, adapt, contest, and negotiate the rapid changes state policies thrust upon them.

This work contributes to existing literature regarding how local ethnic minorities in China experience and negotiate state-led projects. For instance, Fischer's (2013) work reaches similar conclusions in stating that the Tibetans are disempowered and marginalized through the process of implementing state subsidized projects. Goldstein et al. (2010) find that the "Comfortable Housing Project" aimed at building a new socialist countryside in the Tibet Autonomous Region has improved the quality of life of herders and farmers. Conversely, Duojie Zhaxi (2018) studies the impacts of such projects in a village in Amdo through the lens of governmentality and concludes that the project has put locals into debt, increased disparity within the village, and encouraged consumptive behaviors. Much more work is needed to gain a better understanding of the contemporary social, economic, and cultural transformation of ethnic regions under the current development regime.

Harwood concludes by asking two questions: What might a more inclusive development model have achieved compared to the current authoritarian intervention? How could the opportunities and economic fruits of rapid economic growth and development be evenly distributed? These questions are not easily answered. Thoughtful recommendations for policy and decision makers would have made this book even more complete and practical. Overall, however, this book's straightforward prose and personal accounts provide important insight into the local experience.

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